



With Installation at Madison Square Park, Artist Leonardo Drew Ponders Temporality and Horizontality

"City in the Grass" marks a scaling up of a practice that has long investigated materiality and decay.

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At Madison Square Park, artist Leonardo Drew hones his ongoing exploration of materiality, alternatively exalting and altering natural materials. "City in the Grass," on show through the end of the year, interrogates the edges of the nature/culture dichotomy, made sharper by the work's urban context. The installation, a conglomeration of colored sand and wood punctuated by bouts of verticality, will sprawl across the park's Oval Lawn.

Photo by Hunter Canning, courtesy Madison Square Park Conservancy

Leonardo Drew has always played with material transformation and assemblage in his sculpture, but his recently-opened installation at Madison Square Park signifies a monumentality and approach to technique not easily reconciled with the artist's established style of rugged, expressive, and vertical sculpture. Or with his habit of leaving works unnamed.

Drew's "City in the Grass" unfurls across the park's Oval Lawn, where it will remain on view through December 15. The work, a 100-by-30-foot plane of variegated sand and wood that undulates with the meadow's swells and falls, reflects inspiration Drew has found in sources abroad. The ruglike structure betrays the artist's recent interest in Persian carpets, while the sand's colors hark back to four years of his "adventures in China," as he puts it, where he worked with porcelain. Flashes of verticality sprout from the surface, forming a stylized cityscape. "The city is no joke," he quips. "Why not run a carpet through it?"

Astute observers may be tempted to compare the maquette, in concept, to Bodys Isek Kingelez's models of fantastical cities displayed at the [Museum of Modern Art \(https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3889\)](https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3889) last year. But whereas Kingelez's maquettes—minuscule and precious in comparison—were kept assiduously out of the public's reach, "City in the Grass," unlike past installations, invites walking, sitting, and all manner of activities conducted in the park. This naturally raises the prospect of decay—something that Drew enthusiastically welcomes. "The abuse that it takes will actually enhance the life and the experience of the piece," he says, venturing a metaphor for the progression of life itself. There's a transient character to the piece, adds Brooke Kamin Rapaport, deputy director and senior curator at the [Madison Square Park Conservancy \(https://www.madisonsquarepark.org/\)](https://www.madisonsquarepark.org/). Its use of sand summons the "fleeting memory of a sand castle," she says, exuding durability, but ultimately fated to collapse.

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